DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 889 JC 960 491

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TITLE Teaching Relationship Skills in Diversity.
PUB DATE 28 May 96
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Conference on Teaching and Leadership Excellence (Austin, TX, May 26-29, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Classroom Techniques; Community Colleges; *Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Pluralism; *Intercultural Communication; Learning Activities; *Multicultural Education; Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

In-class activities that provide students with intercultural interactions and supplemental lectures that define critical concepts can facilitate the appreciation of diversity in the classroom. One such activity, useful for the beginning of courses, involves the creation of two separate culture codes, or set of instructions, for introducing oneself, and printing them on different colored paper. For example, one culture code instructs students to shake hands and stand close to the other person, while the other code instructs students to do the opposite. One half of the students receive one of the codes, the other half receives the other, and students are instructed to meet students having sheets of another color and interact according to the codes. The activity demonstrates the effect of cultural influences on communication. After the activity, a lecture is used to define the following concepts and further facilitate the understanding of different cultures: (1) culture, or the shared values, norms, symbols, language, objects, and way of life passed on from one generation to another; (2) ethnocentrism, or the tendency to view others from a judgmental perspective using your own way of life or world view as the standard for judgment; (3) cultural relativism, or sincere attempts to understand people and their behavior in the context of the cultures in which they occur; and (4) stereotype, or a broad generalization about groups based solely on the group affiliation. (TGI)

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ED 397 889

TEACHING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS IN DIVERSITY

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August 15, 1996

Presented at The NISOD Conf, Austin, TX
May 28, 1996

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As a college instructor I have grown to appreciate the importance of facilitating diversity in the classroom. I set a goal in each of my classes to bring diversity to every student during the semester. I have found that diversity is appreciated more when students can sympathetically relate to people from different cultures. Helping students to know how it might feel to be from a different culture while not fitting in as they would in their own culture is one way to facilitate a sympathetic experience. In this paper, we will present an in-class activity which if used properly will facilitate the feeling of sympathy toward people who are different from ourselves. The discussion then shifts to pertinent data and definitions which are essential to student's knowledge base.

It is often easier to view others as weird rather than appreciably unique. There are numerous in-class activities which can be used to nurture a sympathetic perspective in students. The one I enjoy the most is what I call, "meet your neighbor." It is most efficiently utilized at the beginning of the semester or at the beginning of the diversity discussion.

The purpose of this activity is to stimulate the development of students' sympathy for people from differing walks of life. Since experience is sometimes the best teacher, this activity sets students up for interaction failure in a simulated inter-cultural interaction. It will provide students with an opportunity to feel what the other person might feel. Students begin to see that other cultures are just as valid as their own. They also see that

without careful consideration of cultural differences, embarrassing dead-end interactions can occur.

Preparation for this activity is very simple. Before class, type two culture codes on separate pieces of paper (see box). Copy code one in pink and code two in gold (taken together, pink and gold are race-neutral and culture-neutral colors). Make enough copies so that half of your students get a pink and the other half get a gold culture code. In class pass out an equal number of pink and gold forms while instructing the students to look only at their own form. Have the students study their culture code instructions.

CULTURE CODE #1 Instructions:	**CULTURE CODE #2** Instructions:
Please introduce yourself to one or more persons from the other group and attempt to get to know them by doing the following: 1. Do not shake hands. 2. Stand as close to the other person as possible. 3. Always address the other person by his/her first name. 4. Pat the other person on the back or touch their arm frequently. 5. Ask only personal questions about family, health, children etc... 6. Do not discuss your jobs, business, world events, etc... Try to be as natural as possible but DO NOT DEVIATE FROM ABOVE.	Please introduce yourself to one or more persons from the other group and attempt to get to know them by doing the following: 1. Shake hands. 2. Maintain as much distance as possible between yourself and the person with whom you are speaking. 3. Always address the other person by his/her titles or last names (never by first name). 4. Talk only about weather, business, world politics, etc.. (stay away from personal topics). Try to be as natural as possible but DO NOT DEVIATE FROM ABOVE.

Let them know that for the next few minutes they will have a new culture (either pink or gold). Instruct them to stand up and meet another student in class who has a <u>different</u> colored culture code.

Instructors will probably enjoy watching the students as they attempt to establish cross-cultural communication. After enough time has elapsed (usually 5-7 minutes) have the students return to their seats and facilitate a discussion about why things kept going wrong. At some point have a student read out loud the gold instructions and another read the pink instructions. There are many concepts which students may learn from this activity and which may come out during the discussion. Be sure to emphasize the cultural influences in the breakdown of communication. Also try to emphasize the idea that all cultures are equally valid and that it is important to remember that our own culture may well be as different to others as their's is to us. Without careful consideration before hand, intercultural relationships may be halted at first acquaintance. Even though this is in a class-room setting, students will have had at least one experience in meeting people from diverse backgrounds. It is important to emphasize the practical value of these skills in terms of career and interpersonal success.

After having facilitated this activity the lecture turns to some of the conceptual underpinnings of understanding people from different cultures. Understanding culture begins with a few facts and definitions.

There are roughly 300 nations in the world, but there are many more cultures. The Encyclopedia of World Culture (1991) provides. information on the nearly 1,500 currently existing cultures in the world today. Past migration to the U.S. and migration within the

U.S. has facilitated a geographic dispersion of many from those cultures. Your neighborhoods, schools, and work places are probably comprised of these many diverse peoples.

While it would be a bit unrealistic to expect every interaction to be mutually enriching and rewarding, it is reasonable to expect to gain skills in successfully meeting, getting to know, and working with others who may be different in some way. You must first become aware of culture and its impact on our lives. **Culture** is defined as the shared values, norms, symbols, language, objects, and way of life that is passed on from one generation to the next. In a sense, culture is a set of lenses through which we come to view our world. It is an important yet subtle part of our world taken for granted.

Once you have interacted for a while with a person who was raised in a different culture, it becomes easy for you to describe what is different about their manner or behavior. Ironically, that description of difference is really one about how different you are. You see culture is learned and it is built into our assumptions of life. In its quiet, almost invisible way, culture shapes our perceptions and actions. Thus, it is difficult to describe or identify without some form of comparison.

When you first meet a person from a different culture, whether in your home land or theirs you probably behave as you normally would. You soon notice that they behave as they normally would but it is different. For example you might extend your hand to another and they might just stare at it and wonder why you are showing it to them. Aha! You notice that they are different. At the same

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time they notice that you are different. It is critically important in cross-cultural relationships to remember that your observation of diversity is reciprocated by someone else; if someone else is different then by definition you are to (if only to them). Once you do observe differences stop and think what someone from your own culture would be expected to do and why.

At this point in the lecture your students should be receptive to three critical definitions which relate to how we perceive people who may be different from ourselves. The first is **ethnocentrism** which is the tendency to view others from a judgmental perspective using your own way of life or world view as the standard for judgement. In other words, "the way I grew up and how I see the world is correct and all others are more or less wrong when compared to it." This is a common first reaction to new cultures. For some it is a rigid thinking process. As was mentioned before there are almost 1,500 cultures in the world today. To consider them in terms of right and wrong is to miss the importance of the values of human diversity. It would be similar to judging ice cream flavors; which is right rocky road or pralines and cream?" The answer is simply, neither. Both are flavorful and each has its unique attributes.

Once, I overheard a traveling business man complain about the Amish buggies and how absurd it was for them to continue to use horse drawn transportation when automobiles were readily available. He had been driving on the back roads of Pennsylvania and Ohio and had to slow down frequently in order to pass or avoid hitting them. He decided to stop at a State Trooper station and file a complaint

against "those backward people." The trooper reprimanded him and informed him of the strict state laws which protect the Amish and which would apply to him if he were to crash into a buggy. In the trooper's own words, "you are in Amish country and you'd best slow down and respect their way of life!"

The business man's mistake is a commonly made one, assuming that a culture is inferior because it differs from our own or from what we are used to. Many students are poorly prepared to interact with people from other cultures. Some have not yet realized that difference is valuable. Others have not had the experience of traveling or interacting with diverse peoples.

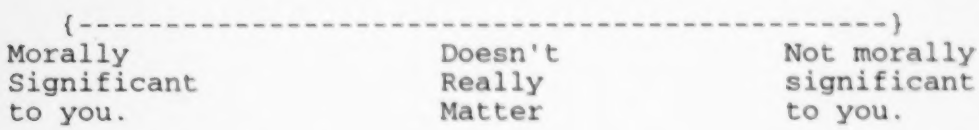
Students returning from travels often comment that "the women don't shave their legs, they never shower or bath, or you should have seen what they ate." The irony here is that persons visiting the U.S. might just as boldly observe that "U.S. women are obsessed with their leg and armpit hairs (and removing them), U.S. people shower incessantly, or U.S. people dig their graves with the junk food they eat." In either case, ethnocentrism is present and judgements are being passed.

The second concept is **cultural relativism** which is a sincere attempt to understand people and their behaviors in the context of the cultures in which they occur. Using this perspective you would see difference and diversity in a positive light. Culture is used as the context for gaining a clearer understanding. It helps to take note of the intricate aspects of society where culture is reflected and expressed. By doing so you begin to look for the history, social structure, and interaction patterns of groups and

institutions to gain further understanding. It not only helps to dissecting the component parts of society and its functions, but it also helps in establishing a culturally relativistic perspective.

To this point we have seen that ethnocentrism is associated with closed-mindedness and poor inter-cultural relationships. While cultural relativism is desirable from the point of view of sincerely wanting to understand and succeed in your relationships. But what if the attitudes and behaviors of the person you will be associating with comes into conflict with your personal value system? In the figure below you see a values continuum. Every attitude and behavior you are concerned about can be placed somewhere on this continuum.

Figure of Values Continuum



You can easily become aware of your moral reasoning processes. Once you understand how you make values judgements you will be better skilled at understanding and interacting. You are the best judge of what you think violates your values and why. When you make inter-cultural contact and are confronted with behaviors which threaten you, then locate that behavior on your values continuum. Even if you discover that the behavior is morally significant to you and not to someone else, you will also discover that you can continue your association with that person. The relationship or

association does not have to fail because of value differences.

I have found that one of the greatest threats to successful cross-cultural interaction, is the threat students feel in the area of their values. If they feel threatened morally they tend to close up and lose that open minded quality requisite for success. This is why it becomes paramount to let them know (and come to believe ourselves) that one does not have to forfeit his or her values to be a cultural relativist. Learning to know when ones values or morality is in jeopardy and when it isn't empowers students as actors in these interactive settings.

The probability of living near, working with, and associating with people who have different values and beliefs is very high. If your differences in values becomes an issue then you can deal with it at that time by discussing why certain issues are important to you. Keep in mind that cultural relativism does not require you to forfeit your values or to behave contrary to them.

The third concept is stereotyping. A **stereotype** is a broad generalization about groups based solely on the group affiliation. Humans tend to organize the vast amount of information they receive into categories. This makes it easier to organize and retrieve information when we need to. We tend to use categories for people we interact with as well.

Stereotypes are categories about people, individuals and groups. They represent shortcuts to thinking. We retrieve them with labels such as:Jews, Blacks, women, or welfare recipients. Many stereotypes are based on false information. They also represent thinking at the wrong level in terms of interpersonal

interaction. You probably don't think of your close friends in terms of categories. When you meet a member of a group and have already heard stereotypes about the group, try to quiet those stereotypes. Focus your attention on that person, who they are, and what the content of their character truly is. It may take practice at first but you can become skilled in shifting your thinking from the categorical to the interpersonal level.

The box below presents just a few of the notable goofs and mistakes which have occurred because of inattention to culture. They are taken from Ricks (1983). Speaking as one who has inadvertently offended others, I appreciate the fact that my blunders were not published for thousands to see. Blunders do occur sometimes. Obviously, the more homework and study you invest into your cross-cultural experiences the less likely a blunders is to occur. In the event that you do offend someone learn from it and use the experience to avoid future mishaps.

Box 1.1: Cultural Goofs and Mistakes.

*Former President Carter's staff incorrectly translated his speech. The translator told his Polish audience that Carter lusted after their women rather than his intended message, of appreciation.

*Former President Kennedy was in Berlin and intended to say that he was proud to be from Berlin. Instead he stated that he was "proud to be a Berliner," or jelly-filled doughnut!

*Former Prime Minister Thatcher inadvertently reversed the famous Churchill "V" for victory gesture. This mistake sent all of the U.K. a message which basically means, "Screw off."

*A wealthy couple on a world cruise with their pet poodle stopped to tour part of Asia. After seeing various points of interest, they picked a nice restaurant for lunch. The waiter spoke no english and the couple spoke only english. The couple tried to ask for lunch for themselves and food for their beloved pet poodle. The waiter struggled to understand and finally nodded his head as though he did. He took their poodle off to the kitchen to feed it (or so the couple assumed). After a lengthy time the entire staff proudly returned with a large meal for the couple. To their horror they discovered that their poodle was the main dish!

* A European businessman on an important negotiating trip to China playfully flipped a piece of ice to his companion. The ice accidently hit a nearby official and he was immediately sent home.

*A New York exporter agreed to ship his product to an Arab nation. He thoughtlessly wrapped it in old local newspaper for shipment. The exporter was arrested and his goods confiscated when it was discovered that the wrappings used were old Jewish newspapers.

*Coca-Cola learned a tough lesson when it tried to market its product in China, using the same brand name. Chinese characters which when pronounced sounded like "Coca-Cola" were used and the product distributed. Sales were unexpectedly low and the company soon realized that the name of their product actually translated to mean "a wax-flattened mare" or "bite the wax tadpole!" Modifications were made to the name.

*Ford tried to sell its Fiera in less-developed, Spanish speaking nations. It means "ugly old woman." GM tried to sell its NOVA in Puerto Rico. There No Va means "it doesn't go!" Sales were very low in both cases.

From Ricks, D.A. (1983) Big Business Blunders. Dow Jones-Irwin:Homewood Illinois and Archer, D. (1991) the video World of Gestures. U. of Cal. at Santa Cruz.

By now, your students have been exposed to both experience and information which will help them to develop cultural skills. The skills of getting to know, working with, and associating with those from diverse walks of life requires a commitment from them. Their time and resources will be well invested by applying themselves to the pursuit of cultural diversity skills. Add to that their real-life experience and they may eventually have a powerful cultural

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perspective. The classroom activity, data presented, and definition discussed in this paper provides a starting point for gaining cross-cultural skills in diversity.